

California

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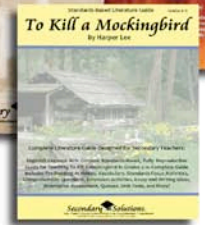
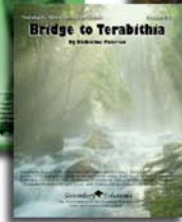
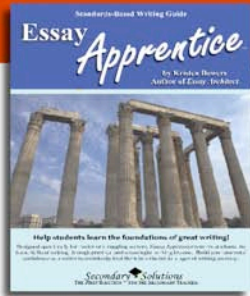
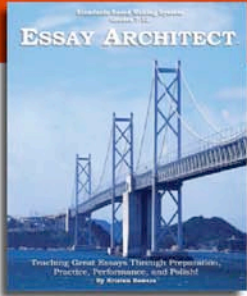


Volume 15, No. 2 – November 2009 – CALIFORNIA WRITING PROJECT ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
Articles by Marek Breiger • Cathy Cirimele • Belinda Foster • Liz Harrington • Diana Jiménez
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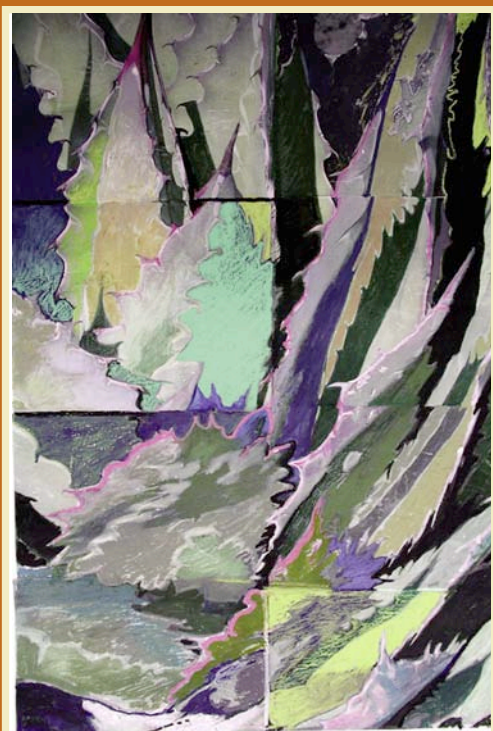
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In this issue: West Coast Drawing

Founded in 2003, West Coast Drawing aims to show that drawing, in all its diversity, is an end, not just a means; that it is as valid an art form as oil on canvas, fresco on walls, carved marble or contemporary quirks. Some of San Diego's best artists working in drawing media come together in this group for mutual inspiration and exhibition - and to raise the bar for drawing. They define drawing as any two-dimensional expression that goes on dry or with a stick.

Members meet about once a month to plan exhibitions and to hear speakers who enhance their artistic lives. Membership standards are high and membership is limited to 25. Several of the group are shown on the facing page.

For more information see the website wcdrawing@san.rr.com

From the Editor

Carol Jago



In 1977 I was in my third year of teaching at Lincoln Junior High School in Santa Monica. Although I liked teaching very much, I never planned on sticking with it for long. My best friend was applying to law schools. I thought I might do the same.

That spring the principal approached me to ask if I was interested in applying to be a fellow in a new summer program at UCLA. It was called the Writing Project. My guess is that the directors of the project tapped my school district, Santa Monica Unified, as a likely partner for future work and invited them to suggest a teacher. My principal scanned the usual suspects and lighted on me. I don't remember the application or interview but will never forget the first day of the institute.

As you might expect, we began with introductions. My colleagues around the table were accomplished, professional teachers hungry to talk about writing. These were remarkable people with 15 to 25 years of classroom experience and excellence all gathered in one room. I was a kid. I seemed to have a natural way with students and a life-long passion for reading, but what I knew about pedagogy could fit in a nutshell. Introductions over, I planed to slip out for a swim at the UCLA pool (membership at the recreation center was included in the fellowship) and decide whether or not to return.

The water must have assuaged my anxiety, and I went back. In many ways I have never left. Those 1977 UCLA Writing

Project fellows were my teachers. They showed me what it meant to be a teacher in ways that my credential program and colleagues at Lincoln had never managed to. They inspired me. Rae Jean Williams, Ed Valentine, Jenee Gossard, Diane Dawson, Dick Dodge, Ruth Mitchell and others set a standard of professional engagement that has stayed with me to this day. They helped me see:

- Being a teacher means being a learner.
- However much you think you know, it is always worth thinking some more.
- In a quandary? Read the research.
- Teaching well can be thrilling.

James Gray, founder of the Bay Area Writing Project and later the National Writing Project, began with a simple and profound idea, that successful teachers are the best teachers of teachers. This seems so obvious that it's hard to imagine that no one thought of it before. Yet this single idea has changed the nature of writing instruction. Over the past 35 years, thousands of teachers have attended Writing Project institutes and been transformed. This is not to suggest that institutes involve brainwashing or cult-like membership. The experience provides opportunities for reflecting on teaching practices. These occasions for learning happen over time, often over years. I didn't suddenly metamorphose into one of my fellow master teachers. I learned how to become one through study, reflection, and a great deal of help from my California Writing Project friends.

This issue of *California English* showcases the work of California Writing Project teachers. Happy 35th Anniversary, CWP!

To learn from California Writing Project teachers, register today for CATE2010 at www.cateweb.org. The convention to be held at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott Hotel Feb. 12-14, 2010 will feature many presenters from the CWP community.

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

FEBRUARY 2010, CALIFORNIA WRITERS, (DEADLINE JANUARY 1, 2010)

California is and has been home to a host of poets, dramatists, novelists, and nonfiction writers. This issue of *California English* invites you to share with colleagues how you use the work of one or more of these writers in your classroom. What authors have spoken powerfully to your students? How has literature from and about California enriched your curriculum? Who are your favorite California writers? What works would you recommend CATE members read ... or reread?

APRIL 2010, ADOLESCENTS ON THE EDGE, (DEADLINE MARCH 1, 2010)

In *Adolescents on the Edge: Stories and Lessons to Transform Learning* (Heinemann 2010), Jimmy Santiago Baca and ReLeah Cossett Lent explore methods for engaging today's teenagers in the kind of learning that can shape their lives. How have you helped students who live "one the edge" find meaning in your classroom? What literature speaks to them? What kinds of writing helps such students find their voices? *California English* is interested in publishing stories of your continuing challenges as well as your successes.

Manuscripts are peer-reviewed. Please send all submissions to California English editor, Carol Jago. Articles should be limited to 2,500 words. Please submit manuscripts to cjago@caroljago.com or contact Carol Jago at the same e-mail address. MSS should, by preference, be submitted in Microsoft Word or pasted into an e-mail message.

Improving Students' Academic Writing: Developing New Knowledge about Teaching and Assessing for Improvement

by Jayne Marlink

"Out of the [Bay Area Writing Project's first summer institute] grew a greater awareness of student writing problems and the need for a composition program in the high schools that would lead students from writing about themselves to writing about concepts and ideas."

—Jim Gray, founder of the National Writing Project, in
California Monthly, 1974

From the beginning: taking on the challenge of teaching the writing about ideas

The educational forecast in the early 1970s was dire. Newspaper and periodical headlines declared with certainty that Johnny couldn't read or compute, and he certainly couldn't write. The news out of UC Berkeley, the home campus for the soon-to-be fledgling writing project, was equally gloomy. In 1973, 50 percent of freshmen admitted to a University of California campus failed the Subject A Examination, the University-wide writing placement exam. For students, failing the exam meant taking a required remedial class, also known as Subject A, until they demonstrated that they could write at an acceptable level for college coursework.

The Subject A Examination (now renamed the "Analytical Writing Placement Examination") requires that students write an essay in response to the ideas and issues presented in a published nonfiction passage, one that might be read in an introductory college course across the disciplines. Passages for the exam are drawn from authors who are historians, psychologists, anthropologists, biologists, and occasionally essayists whom students might encounter in English classes, such as Jamaica Kincaid or bell hooks. In response to the plummeting Subject A scores that included those at UC Berkeley, Jim Gray noted that "Berkeley's freshmen were bright students, but in the early 1970s, most had limited experience writing papers about ideas (Gray, 2000)."

Because Jim thought one reason for the problem was that university and high school teachers were not talking to each other, he brought together classroom teachers and UC Berkeley instructors to pinpoint reasons for the decline in student writing, especially the plummeting pass rate on the Subject A exam, and to discuss possible solutions. "Blame for the sorry state of affairs was lobbed, like a hand grenade, back and forth across the table (48)." The discussion did not go well, and a second meeting was just as unproductive.

In contrast, the first Bay Area Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute, held just months later, brought together successful teachers of writing, middle school through university, as colleagues with a shared purpose—improving their teaching of writing. In addition to sharing their teaching practices and questions, everyone wrote—in many genres, for many purposes—and they wrote and revised often, creating

for many their first-ever community of writers. In addition to writing to topics of their choosing, they wrote "an assigned piece that moves the writer from a personal experience to an essay about some idea in the initial experience (85)." They wrote to a Subject A exam topic and composed a position paper or policy statement on the teaching of writing. From the very beginning, teacher-leaders in the writing project experimented with genre, all to explore what it means to write about self and about ideas and how to write about experience, observation, and learning in an analytical context. What they learned from their writing informed what they planned to do as teachers of writing.

It comes as no surprise then that the work of every California Writing Project (CWP) site has included programs focused on improving the teaching and learning of academic writing, in particular the analytic writing and critical reading that is so important for success in college. CWP has a rich history of such programs, for example, the UCLA Writing Project's Teaching Analytical Writing Program and the Area 3 Writing Project's Transition to College Program. Over our 35-year history, the purpose of these programs has remained the same—to increase teacher and student expertise in analytic writing, the writing about concepts and ideas.

A new approach: CWP's Improving Students' Academic Writing

During CWP's first 25 years, programs with a transition to college focus waxed, often in response to University of California and California State University outreach initiatives, and then waned because of decreased funding for them. In 1999, California was in the midst of a new outreach cycle, supported by significant state funding that targeted transition to college programs with an embedded research and evaluation component. Taking advantage of this opportunity, CWP launched a new effort built on our 25-year foundation called Improving Students' Academic Writing (ISAW).

Participating enthusiastically in the first year of ISAW were 54 teachers representing 15 writing projects and 18 high schools that reflected California's cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity. The goal of ISAW was to conduct a statewide study of high school students' progress in academic writing and reading—using the Subject A Examination as the measure of achievement—and provide ongoing professional development for teachers to improve their teaching of analytic writing.

Enthusiasm would be an expected response from teachers involved in sustained professional development that included several weekend working retreats, along with school and site team meetings, all in the company of like-minded teachers. But that enthusiasm was replaced by wary anticipation regarding the evaluation component of the study—administering pre/post Subject A exams to our high school students

and then turning over the scoring of those exams to a group of independent, experienced Subject A readers.

More than an evaluation study: teaching for improvement

Every evaluation study has embedded inquiry questions. At the start, ISAW's inquiry questions included the following:

- Will students of CWP teachers of ninth through twelfth grades make significant improvement in Subject A Examination test scores from a fall pre-test to a spring post-test?
- How will we know? What will improvement look like in their writing?
- What teaching strategies or approaches are most effective in helping students improve their academic writing and critical reading?
- How will we help students recognize their own writing improvement and growth?

As our study progressed, however, the word "improvement" took on increasing importance and weight. Our professional development meetings centered on how to begin to teach for improvement. We wrote and revised essays in order to understand improving analytical writing as writers and teachers. We designed and scored writing and reading assessments to identify instructional needs; we developed instructional materials and assignments, and assessed and documented the strategies and approaches that proved most effective with our students.

The more we learned, the more hard-edged and urgent our inquiry questions became:

- As we assess our students' writing, how can we do more than diagnose the problems that students are having?

How do we help them name their next steps?

- How do we help students build their skills? Would it help if we shared smaller writing tasks, the informal writing we ask students to do, and the early writing assignments that help students work up to the analytical work of Subject A-like writing?
- How do we make sure, as we develop lessons and units together, that we are not just preparing students to take a test?
- How does our school team move a curriculum that has been mostly literature-based toward incorporating more non-fiction? What are some good, interesting, yet challenging non-fiction pieces to use?
- If we want to help students write more analytically, how can we find readings that are great analytical essays and can serve as examples of the writing we are asking our students improve toward?

Underpinning our questions was the need for one to have a clearer understanding of what improvement in analytic writing looks like for high school students, and we were grappling with what teaching for improvement meant for us, their teachers.

An assessment problem: scoring and documenting improvement

The closer we moved to scoring the pre/post essays, especially by the time we began to develop a set of rangefinders for the independent scoring session, we knew we had a new improvement problem to solve. The only rubric we had in hand at the time was the Subject A scoring guide, a holistic rubric used for evaluative purposes, for sorting out passing papers from failing ones. For such an evaluative purpose, it worked well and provided an efficient way to score up to 20,000 essays

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at a time. But as anyone who has studied matched pairs of student essays scored with holistic rubrics can say amen to, analyzing what's improved from a pre-test scored a "low 3" to a post-test scored a "mid 3" is not very informative for teachers and is even less so for students. Using an evaluative rubric was probably not going to tell us much about the specific improvements of our students.

Another improvement problem for us was that the Subject A scoring guide was written in the way all evaluative rubrics are—descriptions of passing scores are written in positive terms and those of failing scores are described in terms of deficits. In short, passing papers do; failing papers don't. The language used is not a fault of the scoring guide or rubric. We needed a scoring guide that assessed improvement in analytical writing, not passing or failing, and because we did not have such a tool, we needed to create one.

Forced choice reading: collecting the language to describe students' developing progress

We made the decision to ask our essay readers to do double the work. In addition to scoring the pre/post essays using the Subject A scoring guide, because we needed those scores for our evaluation study, we conducted a second, "forced choice" reading of the papers. Readers received pairs of pre/post essays, and not knowing which essay was the pre or post, they were asked simply to read the pair, decide which paper was the better essay, and then list what made one better than the other. We knew in some cases the better paper would be the pre-test. That happens for some students when they write for high-stakes purposes; they don't improve. Interestingly, the percentage of papers chosen as better through the forced-choice reading mirrored the percentage of papers that were given better holistic scores.

The purpose of the forced-choice reading, however, was to see if we would collect language that could help us name the improvements these experienced readers saw in the better essays, most of which were the post-tests. The readers did not disappoint.

The better paper shows a developing understanding of the analytical task. It is more of an essay. The weaker paper is more a narrated, parallel example of the passage.

The better paper summarizes the passage with a purpose. The weaker paper is an extended restatement, a retelling of the passage (fairly accurately though, it should be said).

The better paper critiques ideas in the passage from her reader's perspective and anticipates our needs as readers of her response.

The better paper shows an understanding of control—from overall organization to the sentence level.

The better paper has better grammatical errors.

The better paper is just more confident. The writer has a lot to learn, but seeing the two papers together shows how far he has come. Will he get to see what I saw here?

A new assessment tool: creating the ISAW Improvement Scoring Guide

From the forced-choice reading, we took away over 300 pages of descriptors of what mattered and counted as improvement. With that information as a starting point, ISAW teachers, community college instructors, and university composition faculty launched an exciting five years of knowledge development—the creation of the ISAW improvement scoring guide. We met regularly to create this guide in the way rubrics were originally developed—by reading and discussing student writing.

As we developed the improvement scoring guide, we drew on recommendations from Richard Haswell who asserts that if a group believes that "the essential function of a writing course is to foster improvement in writing," then using what he terms a "paired comparison" method will give much more information about how much the student has progressed during the course (Haswell, 1988). Based on some of the paired comparison formats Haswell suggested, we decided that we would write descriptors for four stages of improvement, the first being the beginning steps students were taking in writing more analytically, the fourth being where we wanted them to progress.

We then created seven improvement categories: Response to the Essay Topic, Understanding and Use of Text, Development, Organization, Word Choice and Sentence Structure, Grammar, Usage and Conventions, and Anticipating Readers' Needs. While that list may not seem unusual, perhaps some of the 18 dimensions across the categories will surprise—Reasoning, Employing Sentence Structure to Convey Ideas, Using Grammatical Relationships.

What may be more unusual is that the ISAW Scoring Guide uses no deficit language. Read the three writing dimension bands below from left to right and then imagine that in addition to the teachers using the improvement guide in writing conferences, students have illustrations of what these improvements look like in student essays including their own. Imagine too that their teachers help them keep track of their improvements, remind them that working to improve one area might mean a step back in another, point them to their first essay attempts so they know how far they've progressed, and celebrate their improvements at the end of the year. Finally, imagine that the scoring guide is a living document that has been refined through 34 revisions based on its use in assessing the writing improvement of over 19,000 students and because of ongoing suggestions from an ISAW professional network that now includes over 400 teachers.

Responding to the Identified Issue/Subject	Reacts to general subject with own ideas thoughts, or experiences.	Relates identified issue/subject to own ideas, thoughts, or experiences.	Responds to identified issue/subject by taking a stance or position that draws on own ideas thoughts and experiences.	Demonstrates an understanding of own essay as an exploration of one's ideas and position in response to identified issue/subject.
Developing Example(s)	Mentions example(s) that may be isolated or disconnected from the claim(s.)	Provides appropriate example(s) with some links to claim(s).	Develops example(s) to support claim(s).	Elaborates well-chosen examples, linking them through convincing analysis to claim(s).
Introducing the Essay	Starts, perhaps relying on formulae.	Provides some orientation or connection to the essay topic.	Connects the reader to the essay topic and orients the reader to the writer's purpose.	Not only orients the reader, but establishes the writer's control by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stating or depicting key issues. • Providing the context of the author's idea. • Moving the reader in the writer's direction.

In a meta-study of the early years of ISAW, Laura Stokes of Inverness Research Associates writes, ISAW's "collective effort ultimately produced an instrument that captured the range of writing characteristics students exhibit and developmental pathways they take as they develop academic literacy before college. ... ISAW participants wanted the rubric to reflect their grounded knowledge of how these skills evolved, and they wanted the rubric's language to be of practical instructional use for themselves and their students. In effect, they were building a new grounded theory of academic writing development, grades 9-12 (Stokes, 2008)."

Assessment-focused instruction: improving writing and teaching

What began as an evaluation and research opportunity more than ten years ago has developed into a network of classroom and school communities focused on improving analytical writing. The ISAW knowledge we have constructed has yielded instructional resources and assessment tools that help teachers and students recognize and document specific improvements in academic writing, demystify for students what to work on next, and give teachers assessment information on which to base sound instructional decisions. The ISAW community of teachers is using that assessment information to accelerate the writing improvement of all students—the college-bound, English learners, struggling writers, and special education students—and prepare more of them for the writing of college and the writing about ideas.

More to the point: does ISAW make a difference for students? During the last two years, CWP embarked on a new ISAW effort, a Local Site Research Initiative study supported by the National Writing Project, comparing the writing achievement of high school students whose teachers are participating in ISAW programs to that of students whose teachers are not. The study is evaluating the student performance of 3600 students in the classrooms of 87 program and comparison teachers from 18 high needs schools. An independent

group of readers evaluated students' improvement across ISAW's eighteen dimensions of writing and found that students in ISAW classrooms outpace their comparison counterparts in all eighteen dimensions. Evaluators found the differences to be large enough to be considered statistically significant.

An invitation: co-constructing new knowledge

ISAW is not a closed, one-size-fits-all community, and we have much more to learn. If you are intrigued by the knowledge we have constructed and especially if you would like to help us make new knowledge, we invite you to join us in Los Angeles on February 11, 2010 for the CATE Pre-convention Day—Improving Students' Academic Writing: Traveling the Road to Success.

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About the Author:

Jayne Marlink is Executive Director of the California Writing Project.

Homage to the California Writing Project

by Marek Breiger

This is my thirtieth year of teaching high school English and teaching what used to be called “Composition,” which, I think, is just another name for creative writing.

The Bay Area Writing Project, which is part of the California Writing Project, allowed me—at almost the very beginning of my career—to teach writing in a way that was honest, and that did not compromise my principles.

The summer I enrolled in B.A.W.P. at U.C. Berkeley had been the summer after a nightmare year of teaching writing courses. I had taught composition classes with 41 and then 43 students while also teaching two American Literature and one Honors 11 grade English class, and the composition classes were filled with students who had significant problems in terms of organization, syntax, and motivation.

My superiors had a simple solution: the traditional five-paragraph essay. Each paragraph would have a word count, and the thesis would always appear as the final sentence of the introduction. Topic sentences were mandated as the first sentence of each body paragraph. The students were never to use the first or second person. Writing an essay about imaginative literature was also discouraged. Fiction, it was explained to me should be separated from non-fiction.

I was in a quandary. I had an M.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from San Francisco State. The program had been founded by the great novelist, Van Tilburg Clark, who had written *The Ox-Bow Incident* and who also, for the first fifteen years of his career, had been a dedicated high school English teacher. Clark had been proud of San Francisco State’s connection with high schools and community colleges. He hoped that graduates in Creative Writing would be teaching English with Creative Writing components to non-élite students in high schools and junior colleges. Instead, aspiring writers like me were given no credit for our publications or ideas about teaching writing. It was seen as naïve even to think that the “average” student could write creatively.

The Bay Area Writing Project restored my faith in the road I wanted to travel as a teacher of writing and as a writer. This in a time before Creative Non Fiction became a part of the graduate programs in Creative Writing, B.A.W.P and the California Writing Project was all about using nonfiction in a creative way.

The simple “Saturation Report” is an example. I have had students write saturation reports since my introduction to the genre that summer in Berkeley. The sense of organization, the

paragraphing in a Saturation Report emerges from the assignment. Students sit at a café or a park or a McDonald’s and simply take notes, dividing the notes into subtopics of sight, smell, sound, and (for me) association and memory. They turn their notes into coherent paragraphs that describe a specific place. The result may be a five-paragraph essay but it will also be a five-paragraph prose poem and the thesis, which can come in the introduction or conclusion, is just as valid as a thesis placed at the end of what is often a robotic introduction.

The Project also gave examples of using topic sentences creatively: a handout of an essay written by novelist and poet Robert Penn Warren began with the sentence: “You have seen him a thousand times.” The remainder of the essay describes a country farmer in a way that can be adapted to the student writer’s viewpoint and that teaches repetition in a way that communicates more than a desire to write a passing paper. Warren writes: “You have seen him standing on the street corner on Saturday afternoon in the little county-seat town. He wears blue jean pants, or overalls washed to a pastel blue, like the color of the sky after a shower in spring...” (“The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger”) Over the years I have had students write mini-essays using the starter sentence “You have seen him a thousand times” about personalities as different as Madonna, George W. Bush, President Obama, Hillary Clinton and Michael Jackson or the teacher next door. If one wishes to teach the value of a topic sentence a single paragraph with the opening “You have seen him (or her) a thousand times” will do the trick.

The Project also helped me see peer editing as a possibility. The editing we were taught focused on a small number of possible hints rather than corrections. The peer editor would examine verbs and suggest possible changes that made the verbs more pictorial. Adjectives could be examined for exactness. And nouns viewed for their specificity. An important part of the peer edit would be simply a reaction to the piece: was it interesting? Could it be added to? What was confusing? The teacher was after a finished product and an essay with promise could rate a rewrite instead of a rebuke. It would be up to the student, however, to be the final proofreader.

That summer that I enrolled in B.A.W.P., we also used Studs Terkel’s *Working* as a model on how to deal with oral histories. The interview process is only the first step in an editing process that teaches selection of details and narrative transition choices. Parts of a non-fiction monologue can be turned into a poem or a non-fiction short story. And subjects for oral history can be

and should be members of the school and adult community, a good lesson in face to face relationships in the present fantasy era of Facebook where kids have the illusion of a friendship based not on shared experiences but on false bravado.

Luckily, what I learned the summer of the Project, was not rejected by my high school. The Writing Project, in the earliest 1980s, had enormous credibility. Soon after, in 1986, Robert Atwan began to edit "Best American Essays" and non-fiction once again became as respected as the short story. I have taught numerous writing classes in high school and community college and my own writing deserted the short story for the essay, for creative nonfiction.

Yet the fight is far from over. Grossly overcrowded classrooms are back and too many writing teachers do not think much of their students' capacity for writing. Timed essays, by their nature, value speed over creativity and many of us are loath to let students use the first person or personal experience even in a part of an essay dealing with imaginative literature. Are students even allowed to view the essays they have written for SAT II? What is the point of a twenty-five minute time limit? How many students will discover Studs Terkel's interviews on the internet?

The California Writing Project, without neglecting the importance of structure and coherence, used models by professional writers to teach student writers and trusted in the ability of students to read and write creative nonfiction. I enrolled in the Project in the summer of 1982 and I have been grateful ever since. Even in this time of budget cutbacks, publishing in booklet form, individual best paragraphs of description as a class set, another California Writing Project innovation, will honor those students who have learned to try to use language as a painter uses colors in the attempt to convey our shared passage, as students and teachers, through not just school—but through the mysteries of time.

About the Author:

Marek Breiger teaches English at Irvington High School in Fremont, California. Besides his thirty-nine appearances in *California English*, his essays, poems and short stories have been included in five major anthologies dealing with the American west including *Where Coyotes Howl* and *The Wind Blows Free*, University of Nevada press



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How the Writing Project Made Me a Lifelong Learner

by Liz Harrington

We have thousands of demands on our time, but we need to pause and remember that the choices we make in our own learning lives have the potential to lead our children into much more in-depth learning and understanding" (Keene, 2008, p.194). Since becoming a Fellow of the Writing Project at the University of California, Irvine (UCIWP), I have been privileged to be part of a learning community known as Writing Project II (WPII), in which Fellows of UCIWP meet regularly to share best classroom practices, and to discuss professional literature and research. This group has allowed me to extend and deepen the transformative experience of the project's Summer Institute by continuing my professional growth through action research, inquiry projects, and professional book clubs. This year in WPII our focus is on twenty-first-century literacies, the new forms of literacy that my students are already embracing, but about which I feel woefully ignorant. Looking for guidance, I chose *Literature and the Web: Reading and Responding with New Technologies* by Robert Rozema and Allen Webb (2008) as my professional book-club reading, a choice that ultimately yielded the "in-depth learning and understanding" described above by Ellin Oliver Keene.

Rozema and Webb detail many opportunities for students to create content online rather than simply reading it, in the arena known as Web 2.0. I was immediately interested in the idea of a threaded discussion, an online discussion in which "...participants post messages over an extended period of time and others respond..." (Rozema and Webb 32). Although similar to blogs, threaded discussions differ from the former in their organization. An important distinction is that entries in a blog are arranged chronologically, whereas in a threaded discussion the responses are grouped by topic, or thread. Because it resembles the Socratic seminar, a technique I had learned in UCIWP, threaded discussion seemed to be a reasonable first step for a beginner like me. I would be dipping my toe into the Web 2.0 pool while wearing the life preserver of a familiar strategy.

My seventh graders had just begun reading Lawrence Yep's novel *Dragonwings*, when our schedule was interrupted by a week of state testing. The class would not meet for a week, but I wanted to maintain their interest in the novel, while creating an opportunity for out-of-class interaction. I was also curious to see whether my students would be able to sustain a rigorous discussion of the text without my intervention.

Guided by Rozema and Webb, I created a class in Nicenet, a free educational site operated by a nonprofit organization (www.nicenet.org). After clicking on *Create a Class*, and providing some basic information, I was given a unique password or *key*, allowing me to restrict access to the discussion. In less than five minutes, I set up a class account on Nicenet, and posted a topic to begin our *Dragonwings* discussion. Set in San Francisco's Chinatown at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yep's novel tells the story of Moonshadow, a young boy who is sent from China

to join his father, Windrider, whom he has never met. Yep's characters illustrate a variety of relationships and groupings that invite an inquiry into the concept of family. Thus I created a guiding question to form the lens through which we would view the novel:

There are several different groups in the novel that could be considered as "families." Which groups are they, and how does each of them compare to your ideas of what family means?

When I explained the concept of a threaded discussion to my students, telling them that they would be participating in an online discussion of the text, writing responses both to the initial question, and to each other, they were immediately enthusiastic. Students were expected to contribute to the discussion at least once weekly, but were free to post additional responses if they wished. As well as responding to the initial topic, or to other students' responses, students could also create their own topics. In a four-week period, there were 125 responses from a class of 36 students. Several students posted multiple responses, sometimes on the same day. Many who were reluctant to participate in class posted thoughtful and articulate contributions and also responded perceptively to the ideas of others, leading to several lively exchanges. As we continued in class with more traditional "face-to-face" discussion of the novel, students frequently alluded to the online discussion to support or enlarge upon what was being said, so that it became an additional resource in the classroom.

The first response was posted at 4:30 p.m. on the first day that the discussion was open, and by 9:30 p.m. half a dozen students had weighed in, either by responding to the first student's comments, or by posting their own responses to begin new threads. The following is a brief sample of the dialogue on that first day:

Joshua: "He twisted my arm. I let out a yell. I kicked him hard in the knee and he let go of me with a grunt. I began to run up the hill. My hat flew off. I kept on running. I heard his boots come closer as he followed me. Suddenly I felt a pain in the back of my head. He had grabbed my queue. I stopped short as he jerked at the queue, and fell on my back. He tore the money bag away from me, but he did not even look at it. 'Pain?' he said strangely. 'Pain? You don't know what it is.' And he began to kick me with his heavy boots" (78). Wow, Black Dog is a horrible relative. Definitely not my idea of a relative. From my point of view, my relatives are always nice. How mean, why did he do this? Black Dog is so evilly evil!

Phung: Yeah, I think so, too. Black Dog was a violent and cruel relative. He doesn't act like a relative to Moon Shadow. "He grabbed me by the arm and his voice grew wild. 'Don't give me your simpering, mealy-mouthed answers. We repaid our debts a dozen times over.'" I think the people in the Company were very

worried about Moon Shadow when he passed out. I think the Company acted like a family toward Moon Shadow. Black Dog was Uncle's son, and yet, he cursed his own son for hurting Moon Shadow.

Ceres: Yea Black Dog is related to them yet he doesn't think of their feelings, for example when he goes out and doesn't return for a long time. And he doesn't appreciate their help even though they [father and most of the company] offer it and give him lots of chances. "'Don't want. . . don't need. . .' Black Dog mumbled....'Remember,' Father said. 'He was a good man once...'" (72).

The discussion that began thus, eventually ran to thirty-four pages and continued through the last day of school. Clearly, students were engaged by the concept of the threaded discussion, and were willing to put time and effort into it outside the classroom, but I was concerned that, left to their own devices, they might not engage in the higher-level thinking skills that I was accustomed to drawing out of them in class. This proved a needless worry. From the beginning, I was impressed that the students' contributions to the discussion were consistently thoughtful, analytical, and perceptive. Xin Yi, an English Language Learner who rarely spoke in class, responded to the dialogue quoted above with an impassioned and perceptive defense of the character Black Dog:

Black Dog did not choose to come to America in the first place. Back in China he lived a glamorous life of luxury, but now in US, he had been roughen up by how the demons mistreated him to become the man he is now. Black Dog hates his father because he brought him to hell. His dad tore him away from the easy life of all he ever wanted. I'm just saying, if I was in Black Dog's shoes, I would feel the rage Black Dog feels.

Reading the responses each evening, I realized that my students were independently employing the skills I had been scaffolding in the classroom all year. They questioned the author and each other. They supported their opinions with evidence from the text, and even cited page numbers. They made connections to their own lives, and to the world around them. They considered the views of others and were respectful when disagreeing. Most importantly the threaded discussion pulled in those quiet students, like Ceres and Xin Yi, giving them a forum in which they felt comfortable enough to participate equally with their more vocal classmates, and an opportunity to have their voices heard and validated.

As previously mentioned, threaded discussion bears a strong resemblance to Socratic seminar. In both cases, the teacher acts as facilitator by posing an opening question, and then stepping back to allow the discussion to flow from student to student. However, I have found that, even in the most engaging Socratic seminars, there are students who are too shy or insecure to speak up in front of their classmates. By contrast, everyone participated in this threaded discussion and each response was acknowledged by other participants. Many students, I surmise, benefited from the opportunity to consider their responses and to put them in writing, rather than being expected to speak "off-the-cuff." Thus, the threaded discussion provided differentiation that allowed all

students to be successful on their own terms.

These seventh graders also demonstrated a willingness to raise, and wrestle with, difficult concepts. What does it mean to be a family? Should a person still be considered part of a family if he consistently bullies, mistreats, and disrespects other members of the family? Are there limits to family relationships? In doing so, they brought to bear all that they had learned about critical thinking and strategic reading. As the discussion progressed, Vincent wrote:

Even though the Company isn't built with true family members they all treat each other so much like a family they should probably be considered as a family. They are always there to help out, unlike Black Dog. Although he is related to Uncle he certainly dislikes his father. Another example of family is the special bond between Moon Shadow, his father, and their land owner. All tried to help out one another, even in times where it was risky. This, to me, is what a real family is.

Although several students agreed with Vincent, Vivian turned the discussion in a different direction:

I disagree with what you have said. Although I agree that Black Dog has deemed himself to not be a member of the family, I believe so for different reasons. Does doing drugs no longer make you a part of your family? In fact, if you did drugs, your family should help you get away from taking drugs, not reject you. Are you also suggesting that by being lazy, he is no longer part of the family? I believe a family is made by the way they treat each other. I believe Black Dog is not a part of the family because of the way he treats everybody. He shows a lot of disrespect, and therefore, he is no longer a member of the family.

This led to a long, and sometimes heated, argument following the thread of family responsibilities, and focusing on the character of Black Dog in particular. In disagreeing with Vincent's reasoning, while agreeing with his main point, Vivian shows that she is learning to be a critical thinker and is connecting her reading to the larger problems of society.

As well as engaging in healthy disagreements about the novel, students also voiced their appreciation of others' thinking. This is not something that often occurs explicitly in classroom discussions, but I was pleased to see it surface here, because I attributed it to the considerable amount of time my students had spent responding to each other's writing in writing groups. The Writing Project introduced me to the power of peer response, and in the threaded discussion I found that students were independently, and quite naturally, using the peer response strategies they had learned in class.

Aaron, very quiet in class, but always a deep thinker, eventually rounded off the sometimes tortuous argument about Black Dog in a thoughtful and analytical "mini-essay," part of which is quoted here:

Family is a bond or relationship that involves constant support, compassion, and most of all, love ... Uncle Brightstar and Black Dog show a lack of compassion, support, and even love. Does not Uncle Brightstar say to spit in his son's face? And does not Black Dog show hatred for his father? The two characters cannot

live with each other as a family, and neither help others as a family. Therefore are they truly a family? This is for you to decide. But your standards determine your strength and stability as one. I personally believe blood relatives may be called "family," yet a true one is based on a true heart.

Jason responded:

Wow. You pretty much said what all of us have been talking about for the past week except you condensed all of our arguments into one statement ... Good job Aaron.

Jason has learned how to affirm the writing of a peer by focusing on the writing rather than the writer.

Carol Booth Olson, director of the UCI Writing Project, reminds us in *The Reading/Writing Connection* that the teacher's job is to equip students with the "cognitive toolbox" needed to comprehend difficult text, and then to lead them to a point where they are able to employ those tools effectively on their own. "If we want students to perceive literature as something that can be richly rewarding, both intellectually and emotionally, and not merely a chore imposed by the teacher, we must find ways to promote and value the students' own process of meaning construction" (Olson, 137). Threaded discussion, I believe, is an additional tool that allows students to construct meaning both independently and in collaboration with peers.

In *Literature and the Web: Reading and Responding with New Technologies*, Allen Webb notes: "The capacity to formulate thinking in writing; the added time to respond; and reviewing the whole discussion

before (and after) making their own contribution; the fact that none of the students are 'called on' but all are responsible to contribute – these circumstances of electronic discussion add richness beyond what is possible in the classroom" (30). The discovery of the tool that thus enriched my classroom stemmed directly from my choice to maintain the connection to a learning community, WPPI, that also enriches my own intellectual life.

Besides, as several of my students noted in regard to the threaded discussion, "It's cool!"

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Working Together

by Cathy Cirimele

I had already been teaching for 25 years when I became a summer fellow in the San Joaquin Valley Writing Project. I was an experienced teacher who had attended over the years numerous conferences and workshops that focused on teaching writing as a process. I was also an active member of the California Literature Project. So it wasn't as though I was a young teacher who was absorbing for the first time the instructional strategies being demonstrated on a daily basis. In fact, I don't think I learned many new techniques about teaching writing from attending the summer institute. But what I did learn was even more significant: I learned what it felt like to sit in a response group and listen to your peers criticize your writing. When I look back to my writing project summer, what I remember most vividly is that I finally felt like one of my own students.

I was a literature major in college. I wrote all of my essays in solitude. I never took a workshop class that focused on writing of any kind. All of my writing was analytical and based on research and reading. But intuitively I knew that the workshop was an important tool. When I began teaching composition at both the high school and college levels, I insisted that my students make response groups an integral part of their writing process. It was not until I was actually part of that process, however, that I really understood how truly valuable it was.

Like all of the revision groups in the summer institute, mine was diverse. There were five of us in the group: two high school English teachers, a university early education professor, a middle-school teacher and an elementary school teacher. Each of us had some knowledge of writing, but most of our experience was in the academic arena. Because our first assignment was a personal essay, there was a measure of discomfort. It is, after all, difficult to share personal thoughts and ideas with people you barely know. But we had done some pre-writing before drafting the essay, as well as some discussion in the group, so we were somewhat prepared for the ordeal. And we were a casual group: we joked around and did our best to make each other comfortable with a fairly stressful situation.

"None of you will repeat any of this to my family, will you?"

"No. We are sworn to secrecy."

"That's good because some hearts could be broken, if you did."

"And, I hope you will remember that I was very young when this happened. OK?"

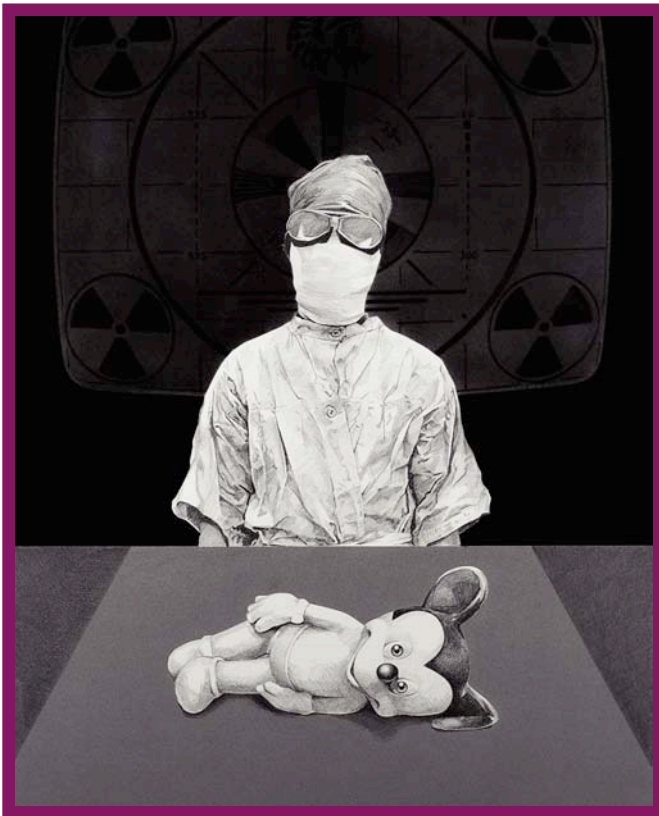
"Yeah, yeah. We've heard that story before."

I came prepared with some writing I had done with my students. I was pretty confident that my group was going to be astonished by the sensitivity and skill demonstrated in my essay. After all, my students were dazzled when I read it to the class. How wrong could they be? The piece I picked was one that I had revised several times over the course of two or three years. The essay was called "Thistle" and it described the last trip my family took together before teenage *angst* and then divorce split us apart. The essay incorporated the techniques that I asked my students to use: interweaving narrative and reflection with specific descriptive passages. I was proud of that essay. The structure was complex and sophisticated and the description was specific and concrete. It was a challenge to write both emotionally and intellectually.

But I was feeling lucky. I liked everyone in the group. They were all good writers and each of them chose a topic that was interesting and enjoyable. As I responded with my peers about each of the essays, I gained surety about my own writing. I had chosen a topic that was emotional but my essay was well-constructed and I knew that it would connect with my audience. It was more than another essay about the chaos of divorce.

Finally it was my turn to read. I muttered something incoherent and, I thought, funny then began. As I read, I kept eye contact with my group members searching for clues about how they were reacting. They seemed engaged: laughing and sighing at all of the appropriate places. I knew that the essay was doing what I intended: my audience was responding in all of the right ways. My confidence was building with every word and every reaction.

As I finished, they gave me a small round of applause and some praise. I took out my notebook and pen ready to write down their



Shown here: *The Great Manipulator* (12 "x 16", graphite/charcoal, by Robert L. Nelson

notes all the time thinking: “I won’t have to write anything down but at least I can look humble and pretend that they have criticism for me.” Then they began. It went something like this:

“I really liked the topic but I felt that you didn’t quite spend enough space on your daughters. In fact you don’t even mention their names.”

“Yes. I noticed that too. Also I would like to suggest that you work on the organizational structure a little more. Shifting back and forth from your childhood to the trip then into the future is a little confusing in places.”

“I noticed that you repeated some words in your description and I don’t think you did that to create a certain effect, did you?”

It took me a few moments to regain my composure. I wasn’t expecting any criticism, let alone comments that were as detailed as these. What had happened here? They seemed to like the essay and now they were criticizing it? How could that be? As they continued their analysis, my mind churned with confusion. First of all, I was shocked that they would find anything wrong with my writing. After all, I had been teaching writing, successfully I thought, for a very long time. If I could teach writing then I should be able to write well myself. Mixed in with this thought was a little anger, not to mention some embarrassment and a tinge of guilt. I was so grateful that I had not revealed my confidence to them; I was now practicing my best poker face struggling to look attentive and accepting. It was difficult to hide the hurt feelings.

But then everything shifted. As they continued with their comments, I looked at my piece more closely. I noted their comments in the margins and circled areas that needed improvement. I actually found myself responding to their criticism without being defensive. “Well, I hadn’t noticed that my daughters’ names were not in the essay. Are you talking about using “magical” three times in the last paragraph? Thanks. I didn’t see that before. Can you tell me what is confusing about the time shifts? I think it’s important to have them but I want it to work for the reader.” Their suggestions were not only accurate; they were useful.

Finally, they made some concluding comments:

“This is a good essay, Cathy. I look forward to reading it when you’ve revised it. It really connects with the reader and, with some adjustments, it’s going to be really good.”

“Yes, I also liked it. Once the organization is a little more structured, I think it will be really powerful.”

“Thanks for sharing your story with us. This must have been difficult to write but I’ll bet it was a kind of therapy for you. I think that’s what writing is initially. Now you can get past the emotion and see how to make it better.”

They were good. They gave me explicit ways to make the piece better and patted me on the back for the effort.

In five minutes, they taught me what I had been trying for years to teach my students about peer response groups: be specific, be gentle but be constructive. I could hardly wait to get home and start revising. Their suggestions were wonderful; by the time I presented my second draft, I knew that the essay was greatly improved. And so did they.

Before attending the summer institute, I had read Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* (Lamott, 1994). The title is a metaphor for writing: take it step by step. It comes from her own experience counting birds with her father when she was a child and his insistence that she must learn to practice patience when tackling a task that requires concentration and effort. The book is basically Lamott’s story of learning to write, with some valuable tips for anyone who wants to be a writer. One chapter is called “Shitty First Drafts.” Although I loved the book and that chapter in particular, I don’t think I really understood what Lamott meant until I sat in a revision group for the first time. I forgot that, no matter how many times I wrote that essay, it was still in draft form. I had also forgotten that there is always work to be done on a piece of writing. I don’t think any writer is ever completely satisfied with what they have written, even after it is published.

As a teacher of writing, the feeling first of frustration and then of accomplishment that I experienced in a revision group is what I relate to my students when I talk to them about writing. Until I felt it myself, I don’t think I realized how frightening it could be. Nor did I understand how powerful it was. I never miss an opportunity to relate my own experience to students when we begin forming revision groups. I remind them that my own group was kind but critical: that was their job. If their group does its job, the students will understand the value of working in a revision group. And with each revision, their essays will get better and better.

In addition, because of my own struggles, I gained an appreciation for the personal essay. Although I often brought non-fiction texts into the classroom as models for students, this experience encouraged me to use more essays for analysis. There are so many good writers who use the essay for both expression and communication. Essay writers like Francis Bacon and Jonathan Swift are both intellectual and amusing, as are contemporary writers like Malcolm Gladwell and Annie Dillard. Because of the summer institute, using essays to teach critical thinking as well as good writing soon became an important part of my curriculum in all of my classes.

Since the summer institute, I have rewritten my “Thistle” essay



Shown here: *Three Loquats* (16" x 6", color pencil/paper, by Irina Gronborg

over and over again: I am constantly changing words and sentences or adding some reflection that I have since gained. The luxury that Lamott and other professional writers have is to have an editor. For those of us who write without the aid of a publishing company, we must rely on those who were prepared to read what we have written: our relatives, our friends, our colleagues, and even our students. Each person who looks at our writing gives us important information that can be used to make it even better. I know that my essay will probably never be perfect, but it does become closer to what I want it to be every time I revise it. That is because I have people who are willing to help me by looking at the essay and making suggestions. My revision group is now any one of a number of people who enjoy writing enough to give me the time necessary to help me with my writing.

Learning to work with a revision group encouraged me to experiment with a variety of writing genres. Ultimately, I found myself participating in writing-project seminars that focused on publishing. As a result, I contributed several essays to three books on teaching strategies published by the San Joaquin Valley Writing Project. Two of those books, one on writing strategies and one on vocabulary exercises, were then published by the Pearson Group. In addition, I formed a writing group and experimented with personal essays, short stories and poetry. I'm even tinkering with an idea for a novel and collaborating with someone on children's stories. I like

to write and I like to share what I have written.

Old habits are hard to break, however. When I sat down at my computer to write this essay, I felt inspired. I knew exactly what I wanted to write. I took a few notes but essentially wrote the essay in a kind of stream of consciousness. I sent it off to our writing group leader fairly satisfied with the result. I knew I would have to make some changes but I didn't expect there to be many. Then our group met to discuss our drafts. Luckily, my years of experience with revision groups helped me with the process. As the group made suggestions, I dutifully took notes and asked questions for clarification. I had learned to leave my ego at the door. All the while, I thought to myself: "Guess this was a first draft, after all. And, to paraphrase Anne Lamott, a shitty one at that."

After working with my writing group and revising several drafts, I submitted this essay. It's not finished; it will never be finished. Even now I can see things that I would like to change. But the deadline looms and it's time to stop. I'm sure all writers are faced with the same dilemma: sooner or later you have to turn it in. This is another piece of wisdom that I pass on to my students. Turning an essay in doesn't mean that there will be no opportunity to go back and revise. The important thing is to seize that opportunity if it is offered to you. But after all of the drafting and revision, the reality is that, whether you are satisfied with it or not, the piece must ultimately be turned in for publication of one sort or another. The key is to put real work into your drafting and revision, with as much support and conversation as you can get, so that your completed piece is as good as it can be at that particular time.

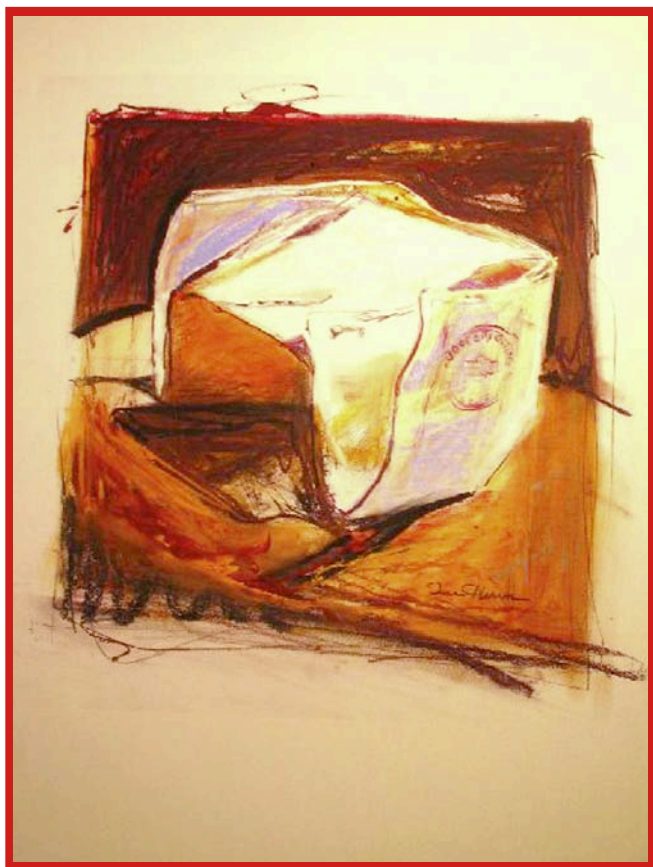
No piece of writing is ever perfect; well, with the exception of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Shakespeare's sonnets and Well, you grasp the point. But, it is the challenge of attempting to reach perfection, like Sisyphus climbing that mountain, that makes writing both frustrating and exhilarating. Working with a revision group creates a journey that is less lonely and even a little easier. That is an asset for any writer. After my experience with the summer institute, I was able to demonstrate to my students every day and in very specific and significant ways what I had learned during my summer vacation.

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About the Author:

Cathy Cirimele graduated with the class of 2008 and retired from teaching English after 35 years. She spends her time gardening, volunteering, reading, traveling, writing and doing whatever she wants whenever she wants.



Shown here: *Karla's Cap Drawing* (12" x 12", mixed media drawing by Therese Cipiti Herron

One Time at Writing Camp

by Sam Patterson

After the line of cars has disgorged the campers and the classrooms have swallowed them up, there is a moment when the process of becoming that happens at writing camp is almost tangible. It is in this moment that I can see the campers shoulder the mantle of writer, I see them settle into it a gradually become more comfortable. These Campers and my colleagues in the California Writing Project have taught me that being a writer is a process.

In my five years of working with the San Diego Area Writing Project's Young Writers' Camp (YWC), I have seen successive cadres of students enter camp and successive groups of writers leave. It is this transformation that I work to bring into my classroom. The Young Writers' Camp is a three-week program for approximately 200 campers ranging from entering grade 3 to entering grade 10. Each class works with two instructors and one or two teaching assistants. The teaching assistants are usually students who have matriculated from camper status. The camp runs from 8:30 a.m. to noon, four days a week in the summer. All in all, the focused time on the task of writing isn't staggering, but there is a transformation that happens at camp. We see it in the campers, we hear it from the parents, we even hear it from our teacher colleagues when the campers enter their classes in the fall.

As both a teacher and a researcher, I have asked myself what is the difference that camp makes? The days at camp are short and there are only twelve of them. The days are filled with discovery hikes, visits by authors, writer-response groups, snack time, mini-lessons, journal time, group writing; and then there is the challenge of helping the campers prepare a piece of the anthology that is usually published between days 9 and 10 of the camp so we have it for the reading on day 11 and the closing celebrations on the last day.

I am still working on a clear, evidence-supported articulation of the difference camp makes, but I have found an enduring understanding that I work to bring into my classroom. Being a writer is an identity that is supported and renewed through the process of writing. There is a critical difference between being a student performing a writing assignment and being a writer in a class. When I am doing my best work as a writing teacher, I work to bring my students to a place where they can see and feel the difference between these identities.

I teach at a small school and have the opportunity to work with writers from 9th through 12th grade. In each of my classes I try to incorporate some of the practices which support and renew the emergent-writer identity in my students. The practices I focus on are:

- Writing without critique
- Sharing for reader response while protecting and respecting ownership of text
- Seeking out critical response

Each of these practices can take many different shapes and when I am being my most inventive teaching self, they do. While I share the way I

bring these to life in my class it is important to acknowledge that these practices emerged from the YWC community of writers. It is through working with the writer-teachers and writer-campers at YWC, that I learned these practices and their value.

Writing Without Critique

Free write, quick write, journal, three-minute drill, it can take many shapes and answers to many names, but the practice of writing to develop ideas and clarify thinking without the pressure of an impending audience is vital to helping students begin to see themselves as writers. This type of writing requires clear expectations. In my classes this usually is in the form of a quickwrite during the first few minutes of class. In most cases, the topic is not open, but directed at the upcoming discussion in class. My pedagogical purpose is to give all of the students an opportunity to develop an idea they might want to share with the class. I don't collect the writing; I don't even assign points to this. As I walk around to check their homework I do look to see if they are writing, and if they are not, I encourage them. I try to finish checking the homework quickly so I can write something down too. Engaging in the process myself lends validity to what I am asking them to do. This is writing that can serve as a jumping-off point for a class discussion, or perhaps as a kernel to be developed into a fuller piece of writing at a later date.

Sharing for Reader Response

While I encourage them to write early and often, I also prepare them to enter their writing into the marketplace of ideas. The first step towards this is to share the writing with someone to obtain a reader's perspective. One of the greatest challenges in writing is anticipating the needs and reactions of the audience. In camp this often takes the shape of writers meeting in small or large writing response groups and reading their work aloud to each other. The readers then share their impressions and responses. This does not happen automatically; in fact, students receive direct instruction in how to respond as a reader and the process is modeled for each group of campers. One of the reasons this is so important to get right is that reader response, when handled correctly, gives the writer valuable information without compromising ownership of the writing. The reader-response process is an important part of our instruction on protecting and respecting ownership of the text.

In its most basic form, this response model asks readers to articulate what the text is currently doing and what the strengths of the text are. At camp there is the time and supervision available to allow students to conduct this response verbally. In my classroom I have developed a paired question-response protocol. In this protocol the response is, initially, all written. The writer has to answer four questions: What is my main point? What part of the essay is the strongest? What could be better? and Where do I need to edit. The reader answers a similar set of

questions: What is the main idea? Which part is most clear or effective? What questions do you have? and Which sentence was most well written? The writer then takes the responses to these questions and uses them as grounds for revision and evaluation. For example, if the reader and writer have different answers for the first question, the writer has some work to do on clarifying the purpose for the writing. This protocol can grow in any number of directions depending on the class. Students can also use this protocol at home. The parents who use this love it because it gives them an active role while letting them off the hook for editing.

Notice that I asked the reader to identify strengths, not errors. This is connected to the idea of protecting and respecting the ownership of the text. When a reader identifies errors, the writer shifts the focus from the original purpose for writing to correcting the errors marked by the reader. Instead, I ask the readers to identify the strongest parts of the writing and I ask the writer if all of the essay can be made as strong as the part identified by the reader. In class I refer to this as revising from strength. (This I also learned in my time with the California Writing Project.)

Seeking Out Critical Response

Through the paired response protocol, I teach students to seek out and control the response they receive to their writing. We discuss different questions to ask responders. When we are working on essays or longer writings, I encourage them to meet with me or other instructors in the writing lab and decide how they want us to help them

and ask for that help specifically. This reinforces the idea of textual ownership and keeps the writers in control of their own writing. This is another step in an attempt to allow them to see their writing as their property and their thought, not just their homework.

Nearly everything I know about teaching writing I learned from my colleagues in the California Writing Project. I was a writing project fellow in 1998 and have since participated in, planned, and led many professional development workshops in San Diego and Imperial County. No matter what role I played, I was always learning, always writing. By far the most profound learning and professional development happened while teaching at the Young Writers' Camp. In this environment teachers collaborate on lesson plans and have a nearly perfect lab class to try out new ideas and approaches. Although I can't teach at YWC full time, I do draw on my experience there to help me continue to identify myself as a writer and to inspire and guide me through the process of bringing all of my students closer to seeing themselves as writers.

About the Author:

Sam Patterson teaches at Kehillah Jewish High School in Palo Alto and is a doctoral candidate in Literacy Education in a joint program between University of San Diego and San Diego State University. He became a writing project fellow in 1998 and worked with the San Diego Area Writing Project in many different capacities before moving to Palo Alto in 2006.

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Revised Membership Fees for CATE

The CATE Board of Directors at its meeting on September 20, 2009 approved presenting to the CATE Annual Meeting, which takes place on February 14, 2010, a change in dues for membership in CATE.

Beginning on July 1, 2010, dues for CATE will be

One year	\$40 (remains the same as current)
Two years	\$75 (adds a new option—savings of \$5)
Three years	\$110 (savings of \$10)
Retired	\$30 (increases the rate by \$5)
Lifetime	\$250 (remains the same)
Student teacher	\$20 (increases from current rate of \$12)

Rates are essentially the same, with the exception of retired teachers and student teachers. We also hope that the new two-year option will appeal to members in order to keep their membership current for a longer period of time without missing out on membership privileges.

If you have any questions or comments about the proposed changes, please contact me at www.cateweb.org.

Joan Williams
CATE Membership Chair

Culture of Collaboration:

The Writing Project's Rôle across the Segments

by Deborah Lapp

It was at a Writing Project meeting on the patio of a Mexican restaurant that a high school teacher colleague of mine complained she had no idea what college teachers expected of the students she teaches as seniors. "I feel disconnected from my college counterparts," she said. "I know what college was like when I was there, but I'm not sure what a freshman today needs compared to what I needed 20 years ago. I have an idea based on what I see in print and hear from my former students at various (college and university) campuses but that isn't nearly as helpful as sitting down with the actual people to hear it from them." When I showed her the student papers in my briefcase, she said she wished she could show them to her students. I offered to email her some after I got permission from the student authors. "No," she said, "well, maybe—I just wish they could see them with the comments and the grades (it was early in the term; 60s and 70s predominated)."

There's a high-school-to-college disconnect—at least in writing and probably in reading, and the Writing Project is our best chance to bridge the gap. Only 14% of the students who come to my college place directly into college level composition, with the obvious corollary that 86% don't. Only 64% of those who place into freshman composition pass, and only 52% of those who place one level below that (the highest remedial class) are successful. Having taught high school for six years and college for the last nineteen, I have some ideas about how both segments operate, but increased collaboration across the segments is necessary if the students are going to make that transition, and the Writing Project provides multiple forums for collaboration.

The principal of a feeder high school was as shocked as I am by these numbers, so he hired Writing Project TCs to teach writing-across-the-curriculum to his whole faculty.

Not wanting to be perceived as a know-it-all college instructor, I asked the teachers to bring samples of student writing, examine it with department-based groups, and report to me their students' strengths and what they thought their students need. The spokeswoman for the science department stood up when it was her turn and said, "What we need is a template, a way to tell the students exactly where the words go." Heads across the whole library lobby nodded, "And spelling," said someone from social science. "Their spelling is atrocious." I took a deep breath. "We can explore a variety of structures for addressing different tasks—different purposes for different audiences," I ventured evasively. More nodding heads.

Luckily, the presenters I conscripted were either high school teachers or, like me, had taught high school before. We decided to start with subject-matter vocabulary lessons which the high school teachers had identified in the needs assessment as a student weakness. The response was varied. A young mathematics teacher exploded in the first few minutes of the first breakout session. He had spent the last two weeks of his summer developing a series of lesson plans based on a new

mandated text, and he didn't have the time or the will to add anything more to his curriculum. The Writing Project presenter adeptly diffused his rage by asking him to bring one of his lesson plans to the next session. By the final session, Mr. Resister was bragging about how successful writing-to-learn was in his algebra class. In science and social studies, the teachers were receptive from the beginning. After vocabulary, the presenters began with reading and analysis techniques using the high school texts, and gave the teachers endless tools, no templates, but whole lessons they could try the next day. English was split; at first a couple of lead teachers decided not to attend because they already taught writing; they used the time to develop grammar units. Thanks to the "buzz" the project generated, first one, then eventually all of the English faculty began attending, and, by the end, I observed them enthusiastically doing a word-symbol-sentence exercise and sharing the new ideas from the Writing Project presenters that they'd tried in their classes. Sixteen teachers asked for an application for the Writing Project's summer institute; a math teacher and an English teacher were invited. After the summer institute, one became part of the leadership team as an intern; she says she has "found a home" in the Writing Project.

I was the most fortunate person. As coordinator, I observed all the presentations. I'm using one of the reading comprehension techniques from the science guy (a paragraph mapping exercise: "What does it say? What does it do?") in my freshman English class, and I participated in small groups with the people who teach my future students.

The most common comment from the high school teachers was that they found it valuable to spend time sharing ideas with their colleagues. Collaboration could have happened without the Writing Project, but the Writing Project with its culture of collaboration was the best vehicle to facilitate it.

This networking between segments will help us complement each other and what each environment allows each segment to do. I was complaining at the start of this particularly packed semester about my whopping 108 composition students when a high school teacher friend told me she has 185! To give students ample practice and feedback, I expect to respond to ten essays per student per semester which comes to about ten papers to read during each working day. If my high school colleague had the luxury of the same expectations, she'd have almost twice the number, and she has only a one-hour prep. So what do high school teachers do? Thanks to the Writing Project, I talk to more of them than many of my college colleagues do (plus, I had that job once), so I have some idea. Logically, high school teachers often focus on the five-paragraph essay, which is only problematic when the students believe this is the only structure for composition. Many of my Writing Project colleagues who teach high school and many other teachers who teach prepared students introduce a variety of organizational strategies—but many (most?) high school teachers whose students feed my college have

large classes, unprepared students with no outside support, and serious language and diction issues; so the five-paragraph essay is way to bring chaos to order; it's a tidy, serviceable, manageable structure. Many of the remedial college classes have the same essay structure at their core. My high school teacher friend was relieved when I said it's acceptable if they come to me with that, as long as they know there are next levels.

I was fortunate to attend the research conference in Santa Barbara in spring 2008, where I talked to several professors doing research on the high school-to-college transition. In researching why some students make the transition from high school writing to college writing without much fluster, University of Washington researchers I met coined two student types: "border crossers" and "border guards" (Bawashi et al, 2008).

Border crossers willingly accept the new world of college as a next step and embrace the challenge. They are less afraid to fail. Jared, last semester, had been, by his own admission, a mediocre student in high school, but he accepted my position that there are more structures for an essay than five paragraphs composed of short vapid sentences, and set out to emulate the models in class. The border guards, having mastered the five-paragraph essay and somehow harboring the illusion that it is the ultimate structure for any purpose, dig their heels in and argue, as Daniel did: "This is how I learned it in high school" (that is, "I do it well; I was praised lavishly and got As. If you were as marvelous as my beloved 12th-grade teacher, you'd recognize that I've already arrived at perfection and need no improvement or contradictory advice from you"). The difference between Jared's writing and Daniel's was minimal when they began freshman composition, but Jared, the border crosser, was willing to take risks and challenges—he tried moving the thesis around and incorporating stories and dialogue. He took responsibility for his own writing decisions, so he progressed with less pain.

This year, I have eleven students from the high school where we held the writing-across-the-curriculum workshops in three sections of freshman composition. Statistically, there are still only 14% of our incoming freshmen placing into college-level English this year, but I wonder if that school isn't over-represented in that statistic. These eleven students are mostly writing passing papers from the beginning, and the one who isn't soon will be.

As we learn new things or arrive at brilliant epiphanies, we ought to be able to discuss them with someone who cares. My musician husband is not always impressed with the minutia of my writing class observations, but my Writing Project study group is. Over the summer, we read Kathleen Gabriel's *Teaching Unprepared Students*, and, as Gabriel suggests, I am beginning this semester with an "interview" of each of my regular freshman composition students. I ask about their writing history and techniques they've used in the past (I'm overjoyed when their high school English teacher was a Writing Project TC). I ask what other writing they're expected to perform in their other classes and what writing they expect to do in their eventual field. We talk about some other things, but I ask if they are ready to try new structures and organizations, and they all promise they are. Perhaps I can program them to be "border crossers."

Together in the study group, we developed assignments from the book to ease the transition; for example, an essay based on a learning styles "test" about what type of learners and writers they are and what type of writers they'd like to become. (Don't tell my students I said this, but I've noticed they're by and large pretty self-centered, and this exercise focuses on their selves; since, when we teach, we aim to be student-centered, focusing on students' selves is utterly consistent). We test our lessons and each others' lessons and then report back with the results. We share handouts and language for the syllabi.

Next semester, I am fortunate to be able to take a sabbatical to study the transition between high school and college writing. In a further inter-segmental collaboration, the researchers at University of Washington and Stanford implored me at that research conference to replicate their studies with the demographics of my student population, which is obviously different from theirs. The university researchers expressed frustration about how difficult it was to find high school teachers willing and able to cooperate. This is not a concern of mine; I will primarily visit my high school teacher contacts in the Writing Project and survey students in their high schools. I already have volunteers because understanding this problem and discussing possible approaches to bridge the gap benefits us all.

I'm running this article by my Writing Project writing group; my reaction to the feedback will be amplified because many of my colleagues in the group teach high school. They are all Writing Project fellows, so accordingly don't rely on the five-paragraph essay, for example, but in the first draft they warned me not to be so ginger about offending high school teachers in the group because they won't be offended; we trust each other. That trust is critical between the people who teach the same students at different levels. When we read what our colleagues at the different schools and different segments have written (and it's amazing how diverse the various responses to the same prompt are), we see what's weighing on each others' minds, and we end up talking about writing and teaching. We benefit; our students benefit; our colleagues back at our own schools benefit from this Writing Project culture of collaboration.

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About the Author:

Deborah Lapp is an English instructor and Honors Program Coordinator at Reedley College in rural Fresno County, California. A former high school English teacher, she is studying the transition from high to college writing.

“Redefining Text, Redefined Me

by Belinda Foster

When it comes to my life as an educator, I admit freely that I walked into teaching with an unfair advantage. I was mentored by two Writing Project teachers and because of that I incorrectly assumed that all credential candidates are “raised” in the Writing Project. I incorrectly assumed that all credential candidates in English Language Arts knew they were writing teachers not grammar teachers. I also incorrectly assumed that everybody knew the difference.

In my fourth year of teaching I confessed to the mentors who had become two of my closest friends that I was considering leaving the profession. Their response to my confession was a simple one.

“It’s time for you to go to the Summer Institute.”

When I tell the people in my life, teachers, friends, and family that the writing project saved my career in education, those who aren’t involved in the writing project only sort of understand what that really means. The writing project saved me by empowering me, by recognizing and capitalizing on the things that made me “different” to succeed at a level I never thought I could. I spent the first four years of my career trying to be the teacher I thought I should be, the teacher I knew I was never going to be. The writing project and my involvement in it from that point on helped me become the teacher I actually was, the teacher my students had been waiting for me to be the whole time.

My role in the writing project, both with A3WP (Area 3 Writing Project) and CWP (California Writing Project), has evolved at the same rate as my role in my classroom. I know that this is a testament to the writing project itself. There is no other place where I am pushed to constantly look at and reflect upon my teaching practice from the stand point of inquiry. There is no other place where I am surrounded by educators who complain in order to achieve change, rather than complain for the sake of hearing their voice. There is nowhere else in the world where I am looked at as an expert in my field, looked at as the solution to the problem, looked at as the source of much needed change.

I am a TC (teacher consultant), a TL (technology liaison), and help facilitate ISAW (Improving Student Academic Writing). In the last few years I have been able to combine all these roles and dive headfirst into an idea that I gleaned from Rochelle Ramay, another TC and ISAW facilitator. I watched Rochelle convince a reluctant audience that a gym floor counted as text. At the time it was just an interesting concept but eventually it became the basis of the bulk of my writing project work, and the foundation for everything I did in my classroom: redefining text for a multi-modal world.

I am a firm believer that anything which contains meaning counts as text. As a result, when we can pull meaning from something, we are reading. When a process is required to create it, it counts as writing. By opening up the idea of “text” in this manner we free teachers and students to explore more widely the world as they experience it. This also

allows for more options in the student creation of culminating pieces.

When we expand our view of text in this manner, we celebrate and support a greater number of our student population on a regular basis. We acknowledge the ways in which our students are already reading and writing. We give them credit for their strengths and begin an important dialogue around the transfer of skills from one mode to another. We more effectively provide differentiation both in what students read, and in what students write. Most importantly, we more regularly allow our multitude of struggling students to take on the role of expert.

It is important to note that this work is quite personal for me. I was 28 years old before I was accurately diagnosed with and medicated for ADHD. I remember the day my Adderall started working; I was at a coffee shop attempting to grade papers away from the noise of my household. I brought thirty with me even though I anticipated grading fifteen at most in the three-hour period I typically spent on trips like these. I picked a table in the back, sat facing a wall, and turned on my mp3 player. Two hours later I finished the stack in front of me and couldn’t seem to find any more papers in my bag. I remember wondering if I forgot to bring the thirty I had planned on. I counted the stack of papers in front of me; I had graded all thirty. I couldn’t believe it. I counted the stack four times; there really were thirty papers. I decided that I must have graded them inaccurately. I re-graded five to check. I asked three people near me what time they had in case my watch had broken. I couldn’t accept the reality that I had graded an entire class of research papers in a little over two hours.

I remember looking at the stack, looking at my watch, looking at my empty bag, looking at the rubrics all neatly scored, and then crying in the middle of this very public coffee shop. I cried for ten minutes knowing that in this moment my life had changed dramatically. I was 28 years old, with a Bachelor’s degree, three teaching credentials and a Master’s degree. I had been teaching English for six years and yet, this very moment was the first time in those 28 years that I honestly believed I wasn’t stupid.

“Remember that what you have is a neurological condition. It is genetically transmitted. It is caused by biology, by how your brain is wired. It is not a disease of the will, nor a moral failing, not some kind of neurosis. It is not caused by a weakness in character, nor by a failure to mature. It’s cure is not to be found in the power of the will, not in punishment, nor in sacrifice, nor in pain. Always remember this. Try as they might, many people with ADHD have great trouble accepting the syndrome as being rooted in biology rather than weakness of character.” - *Driven to Distraction*, Hallowell and Ratey.

I spent my entire schooling without this crucial piece of information. As a result my experience was a frustrating one. As a kid I was plagued with issues I felt made me a bad student and a bad kid, the bulk of which I worked really hard to hide at all costs. My clothes constantly bothered

my skin, I never really figured out how to write in cursive, I had speech issues, and I could read well out loud but had trouble understanding what I read.

I remember crying a lot because I couldn't do things in the way the other kids could. I remember being the kid who loved math but couldn't pass the five-minute multiplication test, the kid who watched the number of kids who took the test dwindle slowly down to just me. I remember walking to the principal's office, the last fifth grader in the school still taking it.

I remember ripping up my homework, frustrated by the impossible task of cursive. My head was filled with hundreds of stories, and yet my fingers just couldn't maneuver the pencil well enough to prove it.

I remember being talked at, not talked to. I remember vague instructions; I remember being hovered upon and constantly interrupted at times when I was finally getting somewhere.

Even though I am 32 years old, have a couple of degrees, and a handful of credentials, I know that I will never ever fully let go of being that kid.

I have to admit that on the flip side, I was lucky. I had a mother who recognized not what I had, but instead what I needed to be successful. When my elementary school pushed for Special Ed, she fought for GATE. When printing was no longer acceptable for final drafts, she secretly made deals with me. I rewrote half into cursive, and she forged the other half. On the days when I felt least capable, she would bring out the art supplies, let me take something apart and put it back together, let me dissect a squid and tell her all the parts, anything she could to remind me that sometimes people at school just don't know how to ask.

My mother gave me my example and yet in my first four years as a teacher, my classroom looked a lot like the classrooms I struggled in

while growing up. The writing project gave me permission, permission to lead by her example, permission to stop worrying about what anyone else thought my students needed, permission to start giving them what I knew they needed.

In how many ways can I ask my students to demonstrate what they know and how they know it? In how many ways can I support the ways in which my students are innately smart and prevent the very real issues of self-esteem, and self-confidence that plague students like me for a lifetime?

I made the decision to toss a traditional idea of writing and reading out of the window. I told my students they were writers. I told my students they were readers. And when they used whining and complaining techniques to mask the same uneasiness that I have masked my whole life, I asked them to trust me. I promised them I wouldn't take them anywhere I didn't think they could go. I promised them I wouldn't take them anywhere I wouldn't go myself. I asked them to trust me and to believe in me until they could believe in themselves.

And then I pushed them. I pushed them with photographs, advertisements, and songs with and without lyrics. I pushed them with recipes, music videos, and each other's clothing. I pushed them with art, sports plays, and diagrams for engines and random machines. I pushed them with graphic novels, comic strips and the occasional cartoon. I pushed them with non-fiction and fiction of all shapes and sizes. I pushed them, and the truth is I pushed me too. But, every time students discovered they were experts in a certain kind of text – students who often are not regularly seen as experts – I promised them that their ability to deconstruct that text could be applied to any other kind of text. I promised them that their ability to create that kind of text could be applied to any other kind they need to create.

I know that my students walked away from my classroom believing themselves to be readers and writers. I know that at some point in the year they no longer relied on my belief in them and instead relied on the belief they had in themselves. When I watched a student storyboard, instead of outline or mind map before a timed essay I knew we had been successful. When students made reference to a painting, song or defensive football tactic as a legitimate argument in a research paper, I knew we been successful. When students were routinely given passes to my classroom after having lost someone close to them from illness, accident, or violence to sit in the back of my room to write, I knew we had been successful.

I still think a lot about that little kid who so desperately wanted to be good at something bubble-able in school. I think about that little kid and wish someone like me had been her teacher somewhere along the way.

About the Author:

Belinda Foster has been involved in the Writing Project since 1999. She spent ten years as a English Language Arts teacher at Grant Union High School in Sacramento and is currently employed as the Secondary EdTech Coordinator with Twin Rivers Unified School District.



Shown here: *Babushka* (11" x 14", graphite/charcoal, by Stan Prokopenko

That's Right. Thirty-Six Hours

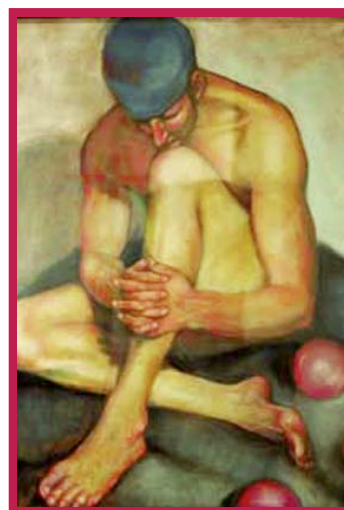
by Diana Jiménez and Diane Shaw

Thirty-six hours. A mere twelve hours longer than Jack Bauer, from the hit show “24,” has to complete his assignment and change the world from a state of chaos to sound global security is what we had to challenge the hearts and minds of middle and high school migrant students attending the 2009 UC Merced Migrant Summer Young Writers Academy. The work entailed teaching and challenging Migrant Ed students to learn and think deeply about the writing process and find the value in their own experiences as springboards for understanding texts. In the writing academy students learned about the value of clear and concise written communication for varying audiences. They studied various writing genres, were taught how to write short responses, how to write process personal narrative essays and analytical responses to literature. Students learned and applied a wide variety of revision strategies in a comprehensive manner and learned how to connect their ideas, personal experiences or analytical responses to literature in a thoughtful manner.

Our students had differing levels of language and writing skills. Most, if not all, had never written a formal process essay. Two students were non-English speakers (level 1) and the remaining twenty students ranged in CELDT (California English Language Development Test) from level 3 to 4 in language proficiency. From the first day we greeted our students we conveyed to them the rigorous writing standards and expectations of this program. The writing academy was not going to be a remediation summer school program but an intensive reading and writing academy that would help them be prepared for the challenges of middle school, high school and even college. Our writing academy required from each student discipline, participation and focus. Students were quickly made to understand that they would be going through a powerful learning experience. The following is a brief outline of our writing curriculum:

1. Journaling and developing voice
2. Description- Writer's Workshop
 - Magnify moment
 - Peer and Teacher Conferencing
 - Show don't tell
 - What is Revision?
 - Peer editing
 - Adding dialogue
3. Narration
 - Elements of narrative writing
 - Personal Narrative Essay

- What is the writing process?
 - Understanding the prompt
 - Prewriting Strategies (Thinking-Aloud on Paper)
 - Graphic organizers/idea maps/sequence
 - Write first draft
 - Audience/Purpose
 - Reading and annotating professional narrative models
 - Revision strategies
 - transitional words
 - dialogue
 - Read-Around-Group
 - Author's chair
 - Circle of friends and the last word
 - Peer revision/conferencing
 - Teacher conferencing
 - Metacognitive – Learning how I learn
4. Response to Literature
 - What is response to literature?
 - Annotating- Having a dialogue with the text and the author
 - Discovering theme
 - Elements of a response to literature response paragraph
 - Introduction – Hooking the reader
 - Body- Where's the evidence?
 - Conclusion – Answer the So What?
 - Revision strategies
 - Peer revision/conferencing
 - Post-publishing



Shown here: *The Juggler* (23" x 31", pastel,
by K.D. Benton

In 36 hours these students experienced the process of daily journal writing, writing personal narratives, descriptions, analytical responses to poetry and literature. The experience required each student to explore the writing process through continuous oral communication for clarification, vocabulary building and usage and accessing academic language. Students listened, made inquiries through discussion, read and were read to. We integrated their prior knowledge and their life experiences to build new knowledge, which they applied through written practice and exploration. They were introduced to a powerful palette of language that they could manipulate to reach their audience and begin to understand their individual voice and style.

The twenty-two students in attendance worked on journals for approximately twenty minutes at the start of each day. The journal entries became the canvas page for the application of revision strategies taught through mini-lessons. We modeled and demonstrated the application of each strategy in our own journals. We wrote alongside the students demonstrating that every writer goes through a similar process, and that it is the depth of reworking through the process that brings about the result of clear and concise communication of the heart and the ideas of the mind.

Our four-days-per-week, three-hours-per-day schedule was packed with rigor, energy, laughter, the sharing of ideas and experiences, and the sense of community as students, as English Learners, as children of immigrant parents, and as writers. For instructors it can often be a straightforward procedure to quantify and explain the lesson plans and curriculum for the academy, but what is complicated to describe is the essence of the honest and heartfelt conversations that generated the sense of community and trust, and which are the foundation for the success of this writing program. Diana talked with the students about her experiences as an English Learner. Her family constantly moved (not just from the U.S. to Mexico and back to the U.S., but also moving within California) and shared the successes and struggles of living in poverty and becoming the first person in her family to finish both high school and college. The students were an understanding audience who readily identified with the cultural expectations, hardships and adversities familiar to English Learners. The sharing of our common humanity and struggles provided the bond for understanding how education is one of the keys of success, and a thriving education includes strong writing skills.

Three weeks flew by. On our last day together we celebrated the work of the UC Merced/Migrant Young Writers Academy students with an exposition of their work. The celebration was well attended by parents, family members, and teachers, by administrators from the middle school and high school in Gustine, by Merced County Office of Education personnel, bus drivers, a school secretary and a local newspaper reporter. Every student had

a family member present. The students sat proudly together wearing their blue with gold lettering UC Merced YWA t-shirts. The walls of the cafeteria proudly displayed the writings of every student. Each student essay on display included all of the drafts, revision strategies, and prewriting notes to demonstrate that the final draft was the result of hours of hard work and great effort. We also displayed pictures, posters, poetry lessons, revision notes, and vocabulary work. So much transpired in the course of the three weeks; 36 hours – a day and a half of intensive, rigorous, high expectation of teaching and learning.

After a few brief words to the parents, students and friends, we presented each student with a UC Merced embossed certificate and many parents proudly captured these moments on camera. After the certificates were distributed, parents were given the opportunity to look at student work and talk with us. The conversations that ensued during this time were truly remarkable. We had parents asking us questions about writing at the high school level, the high school exit exam, college admission requirements, and a solid interest in the high school curriculum, and of course, whether we would have another writing academy the next summer. The celebration gave parents a clear insight into the importance of writing well and how their continued commitment to education is essential for student achievement. Our mission was accomplished.

The Young Writers Academy can only be humbly described as an experience of “doing” writing and whole-heartedly believing that writing can be successfully accomplished by every student. The result has been an extraordinary success. Students experienced writing success within a supportive environment that accepted every student’s linguistic ability and allowed for their physical, verbal, intellectual, and emotional growth. A delicate balance of all these features within the framework of structured curriculum standards and high expectations, along with the rigor of purposeful hard work, produced a well-orchestrated blend of human experience through the power of words.

Our craft has been reenergized and our hearts touched and uplifted by these wonderful and kind students, who gave us the opportunity to share with them and learn from them.

About the Authors:

Diana Jiménez teaches freshmen and senior English and AP Literature and Composition at Delhi High School in Delhi, California.

Diana Shaw has many years of teaching experience at the elementary school level; this year she is a teacher on special assignment for Merced City School District in Merced.

Teaching Labs and Teacher-Leaders

by Michael Weller

My experience as a member of the California Writing Project (CWP) has been multi-sided, offering me chances to collaborate with teachers, to reexamine and refine my own teaching, and to help my students improve their writing.

I am now a Teacher-Consultant for the Los Angeles Writing Project (LAWP), though I also have benefited from my contacts with a number of other sites. I attended the San Diego Area Writing Project's Summer Institute in 2006, before I moved back to Los Angeles, and my experience there marked the beginning of my growth as a member of CWP. My work as a Returning Fellow at LAWP's 2008 Summer Institute continued this growth, and my work since then as a Teacher-Consultant for LAWP has been profoundly influential on my classroom instruction. (If I may change my metaphors, my Teacher-Consultant work has been like a fireworks display for me—the insights I've gained into the teaching of writing are so profound and powerful that I can only describe them by invoking images of explosion and light.) LAWP's co-directors, Robert Land and Carolyn Frank, also have roots at UC Irvine and UC Santa Barbara, respectively, and as a result their colleagues from those sites—"distant teachers"—have influenced me, especially the work of Carol Booth Olson.

Young Writers' Camp: A Teaching Lab

This summer, I taught my first Young Writers Camp (YWC) for LAWP. I worked with a small group of high school-age kids; we met four days a week for three weeks. In the YWC, I was able to try out new writing strategies, some of which I had learned in LAWP's 2008 Summer Institute but had not yet used with students. Foremost among the best practices that emerged from my experience with these young writers was our use of writing groups and community-building activities.

We formed writing groups on the first Wednesday of camp, and began with a community-building game called "Unique and Similar." After that initial exercise, groups had about 30 minutes a day to write together; we also played "icebreaker" and community-building games nearly every morning.

In one group, the kids quickly had the idea to write a set of stories together. In the other group, the kids formed different combinations to create a variety of pieces including a rap, a short story, and an autobiographical piece.

The line between Author's Chair and writing groups gradually blurred and disappeared as the kids talked over their word choice and plot developments as they wrote. During these sessions, I moved back and forth between the groups, listening, making notes, and only occasionally offering suggestions. Allowing the kids leeway, with time to think and pre-write—and resisting my sage-on-the-stage-ish urge to

barge in and solve their problems for them—led to some really good writing, especially during the last week of the camp.

Of course, a "teaching lab" like the YWC, with seven students and a three-and-a-half-hour block, is quite removed from the "real world" of September to June, when many teachers cope with classes of thirty-five-plus students, rigid pacing plans, and limited time. For example, what do "patience" and "leeway" look like in a classroom of thirty-six, with a curriculum that includes frequent mandated assessment? My YWC students were highly skilled and motivated, as well; how do I adapt my approach for kids who aren't as sure about how to use independent writing time, or may not be as motivated to solve the problems they encounter as writers? While I have some ideas, I haven't answered these questions yet. However, I consider the questions themselves valuable—as Michael Fullan has observed, "problems are our friends...if you do something about them," since problems, combined with "a spirit of openness and inquiry," can lead to the learning and insight that is essential to effective teaching. Moreover, the YWC gave me a chance to test out several strategies and reflect on their effectiveness. It's one thing to learn about a strategy in a presentation, but nothing (for me at least) can replace trying out a strategy with kids. Using strategies like the Read Around in our YWC gave me confidence to try out these approaches with my "regular" classes, and allowed me to see what worked and what I needed to modify.

This September, my confidence and insight from my YWC experience have reinvigorated my writing instruction in my "regular" classroom, Room 249 at Mountain View High, in the Los Angeles suburb of El Monte. In particular, I've revamped the way I introduce writing workshop, with the stamp of my CWP experience apparent throughout.

Adapting the advice of Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi, we started with several short read-alouds, excerpts from Michael Jaime-Becerra's *Every Night Is Ladies' Night*. (I chose this book because the stories are set in El Monte; the opening sentences amaze the kids with their description of a boy shooting baskets at Kranz Middle School, which about half of our students attended.) Paired with these read-alouds were several pre-reading activities, including a kind of autobiographical timeline that I learned during the LAWP 2008 Summer Institute in a presentation by Dan Kirby and Dawn Latta Kirby. After a couple of weeks of pre-writing and read-aloud, we launched Writing Workshop with a quintessentially CWP activity—the use of mentor texts, specifically the "Where I'm From" poem, after George Ella Lyon's poem of the same name.

Students looked through the pre-writing in their writing portfolios to see if they already had any ideas for writing. After the students had a few minutes of thinking time, I passed out copies of "Where I'm



Shown here: *Handscape* (7.25" x 12", color pencil, by Karen Rhiner

From," and played Ms. Lyon's recording of her poem. Next, while stressing that "Where I'm From" was an option, not an assignment—a choice on the menu, to use our Room 249 metaphor—I modeled two ways of writing one's own "Where I'm From, after George Ella Lyon" poem. In the first modeling, I went line-by-line and changed certain words: "oranges" for "clothespins," "messy rooms and sunny windows" instead of "Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride." In the second, I used the "I'm from..." refrain but used a less-rigid approach: "I'm from Happy Meals and Round Table Pizza...from Virginia and North Carolina and California."

With the menu thus expanded, I had the kids think again about what they wanted to write. Three minutes later, I used my name cards to select students randomly to share what they planned to work on—making sure the kids understood that "I need more time" was an acceptable answer. In my period 5, most of the kids planned to use the "Where I'm From" format; on the other hand, most period-2 students planned to write autobiographical stories. This sharing process bore fruit immediately; when one girl said she would write about clowns, I commented that I looked forward to reading her story, although clowns frightened me a little. Another boy, who had already shown a wonderful sense of humor, bantering but friendly, announced that he was going to write a story about clowns that eat English teachers. He actually did work on that story, too, before deciding to work on another idea the second day of workshop.

I gave the kids about ten minutes to begin writing their stories, adding the promise that we would, like athletes beginning to train, add minutes to our independent writing time each day until we were writing for thirty to forty-five minutes each class period. At the end of the period, I combined two ideas I encountered through CWP—the exit ticket, which, inspired by Bob Tierney's "Neuron Notes" and William Strong's exit slips, has become an indispensable part of my assessment, and the

Golden Line. For their exit tickets, I asked the kids to choose their best line or sentence; for students who were still pre-writing, I added the option of writing down an idea that they planned to work on next class period.

I was pleased with how focused the kids had been during writing, but even so, as I read the exit tickets that afternoon, I was happily astonished at how good their first Golden Lines were.

Also in these last two weeks of September, we've established writing groups and worked to strengthen our writing community with team-building activities in those writing groups, such as the "icebreaker" Candy Introductions. While our other instructional groupings will remain flexible and fluid, students will have the opportunity to share with their writing groups at least once a week for the rest of the semester. In October, as we expand our menu of writing choices, we will also focus on instruction on how to provide effective feedback for a classmate's writing.

Nurturing Teachers-as-Leaders

Collaboration between LAWP and my school, however, is not limited to my efforts in my classroom. Last year, I was elected to the School Site Council at Mountain View, and became more deeply involved in examining our school's action plan. One item intrigued and concerned me: that we were to develop a school-wide writing process with rubrics.

Here was a sentence fraught with opportunity and peril. A "process" foisted upon the teachers in a heavy-handed manner could lead to resistance and frustration among teachers, and make it more difficult for teacher-leaders to promote best practices. On the other hand, if a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative were designed in an inclusive, deliberative, democratic way, lots of good things might happen. Teachers from all disciplines would be more likely to buy in; our school-wide writing would reflect the diversity of good writing across disciplines; and we would learn about our writing instruction from the process of collaborating. Ultimately, we would become better teachers of writing, and our students would benefit.

Since effective writing instruction, of course, cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach, it seemed especially necessary to build the program with as broad a base as possible. I made this suggestion to site administrators Sandra Stevens and Roberto Salcedo, and with their support, worked to begin rethinking our Writing Across the Curriculum process by inviting representatives from different departments to join a committee that would work to create a vision for a school-wide writing program. Our hope was that this vision would reflect the wide range of writing genres that our students need to master, and the wide range of approaches that can be successful in writing instruction.

This is where our collaboration with LAWP began. With Bob Land facilitating, we held several half-day meetings, for which we recruited representatives from the core departments—English, Social Studies, Science, and Math. As we continued to meet, we expanded

our committee to include teachers from other departments.

The main product of our collaboration has been an assessment framework, the Viking Traits, based on the 6 + 1 Traits Writing model. (Our school nickname is the Vikings.) Our framework has gone through several revisions based on feedback from the staff; it is a living document that we expect to change over time.

Over the summer, we began annotating student work with the Viking Traits rubric. In the next month or two, we hope to provide the entire Mountain View staff with training on how to use the rubric to assess student work—after which we intend to roll out the framework to share with students as a working draft.

In addition to helping us create the Viking Traits, Bob Land's facilitation gave me a valuable opportunity to expand my role as a teacher-leader at my school. I acted as an unofficial co-facilitator, and this experience—and the increased credibility that Bob's expertise and support brought me in the eyes of my peers—gave quite a boost to my confidence in my leadership abilities.

Another Opportunity: Back to the Lab

This summer, LAWP's YWC coordinator, Denise Ross, invited me to co-teach a course that she had brainstormed, which has developed into our first High School Writing Institute. Designed for students in grades 8-12, this course will meet on five Saturdays from October to March, and is intended not only to help students improve their writing, but also to create a sort of young writers' network analogous to the Summer Institute.

My co-teacher Lelalois Beard and I intend to use both writing groups and explicit instruction on how to provide peer feedback in each session. Like the Young Writers' Camp, this experience will only strengthen my efforts to use peer feedback and collaborative grouping more effectively at Mountain View.

My experience with CWP has profoundly affected the way in which I approach my work. It has given me access to a network of professionals who share my love of writing and of teaching writing, has given me opportunities to share my expertise as a teacher-leader as well as deepen my understanding by learning from other teachers, and has helped me become a more reflective, thoughtful practitioner—with a much wider repertoire of teaching strategies. The rest of the school year, with the prospect of co-teaching the High School Writing Institute and exploring the craft of writing with my students at Mountain View, promises to be full of joy and new learning. In other words, my work with CWP has made me a better teacher, and made a career I already loved even more rewarding and exciting.

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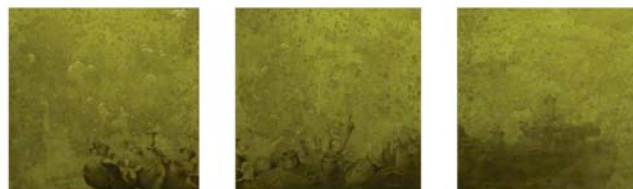
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Shown here: *The Great Manipulator* (12" x 16", graphite/charcoal, by Robert L. Nelson)



Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

Juvenal (from Plato)

I have bitten my tongue so hard, I have practically made a meal of it. With news of the changing winds in Washington I, like many others, sensed better days ahead for public schools, hogtied as they were from 2002 by stage direction from a particularly tone deaf and surprisingly unknowing group bunkered in the nation's capitol. Educational circles, from teachers' lounges to state education curriculum panels, have had a good run of venting about the bad news implementation of the policy known as No Child Left Behind. Safe to say, we were ready to move on.

So when the country's new president, riding a wave of heady expectation from the many teachers who supported him, presented us with an unlikely chief, Arne Duncan, to speak our language, we were startled that the language he spoke was from the prior president's ill conceived agenda. This was about the time I started to bite my tongue.

As a matter of principle, I will not dignify the publicly embarrassing and euphemistically titled crusade, Race to the Top, by wasting good paper on it. Further, it is increasingly appearing to be less a crusade than a witch hunt. The question for us in the schools is whether the California Legislature will reverse course and cede to federal demands tied to direly needed school funds by making "accountability" another way of signifying its true meaning, which would be "teacher inquisition." In short, by holding teachers liable for their students' test scores we will penalize those within our ranks who are now working with the indigent or displaced, the English learner (EL) or special needs learner, and the difficult or delayed adolescent. In a state with 12 percent unemployment, it is fair to add to this mix the children of the formerly middle class. The latter variable is so new, only anecdotal evidence is presently available on the wrenching psychological burdens many children now carry with them to school.

Further, should such over-micromanagement and judgment of the teaching force occur, whatever is presently left of K-12 public education will continue its drift towards being one more historically memorable California monument in peril of shaking apart

like a structure mounted atop an active political fault line.

Leonie Haimson, president of the nonprofit Class Size Matters, writing at length in Huffington Post on the latest assault on the nation's school children and their teachers has stated, "Never before has a Secretary of Education so aggressively attempted to bribe states to adopt policies with little or no research to back them up and that will lead to widening inequities."

What the Research Really Says

A quick look through a sampling of learning research over the past two years confirms that the lockstep approach favored by our Democratic president and the prior Republican administration bears little resemblance to what those involved in classroom investigation and practice deem to be relevant. It is as though a chasm as wide as the realities that divide Washington folk from real folk has opened still further to reveal a rocky bottom with no clear meeting point to identify what the salient issues even are. The political end has become the goal for our classrooms, even when it has no bearing on our students' learning or our work.

While high school teachers have thus far largely escaped the scripted classroom in this state, it may come to pass that teacher discretion and control will soon be relics of the past across all publicly funded educational institutions. Who then is responsible in a pure accountability system for student failure? Is it the individual with a meaningless teaching credential following the override command of a prescribed system? The principal reduced to curriculum fidelity enforcer? The California Department of Education? The handsomely rewarded curriculum developers? These are questions that must be answered before we continue constructing a path of absolute top-down control that has yet to yield any research to support its efficacy in effecting reading gains in real schools and classrooms. The custodians of the public good, all told, are accountable to no one.

What follows are selected annotated articles of important practitioner research, showing what we know works. Look carefully and you will note that the approaches, while stringent, are well-balanced, providing ample room for teacher discretion and broad latitude for professional practice. They are drawn from a variety of journals from 2008-09. These have been summarized for you by CSUB Reading and Literacy graduate student, Maria Fabiola Lopez.

— If You Teach, You Teach Reading

International Journal of Special Education, (2008), Vol.1.23, No.2, Pages 1-7 by Spencer, Vicky G.; Garcia-Simpson, Cynthia; Carter, Bonnie B.; Boon, Richard T.

The researchers emphasize the challenges that effective content area teachers face in addressing the needs of all learners. Specific strategies are provided for the classroom practitioner. Many secondary teachers believe reading is only the responsibility of the English teacher or reading specialist. Effective tools for student comprehension include explicit instruction (includes direct explanation, modeling,



Shown here: *Sand Artist* (7" x 9", colored pencil, by Joan Thompson

and guided student practice), graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, research-based strategies that focus on vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. Likewise, partner reading, read-alouds, reciprocal teaching, supplemental materials (visuals, websites, variety of activities), and teaching students about different text structures (such as compare-contrast, cause-and-effect, sequence, and so forth) can be beneficial in instructing students in reading across content areas.

– English Language Learners in the Classroom

Teacher Librarian, (February, 2009), Vol.36, No.3, Pages 42-43

by Nordby, Ann; Loertscher, David

The authors examine issues concerning English learners in the classroom and the difficulties faced by teachers with insufficient training and experience teaching English as a second language. In the school setting, the most spoken non English language is Spanish, followed by a variety of Asian languages. Best approaches for working with these new learners come to us from Stanford University and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence. Key findings:

1. Teaching literacy in students' native language tends to enhance literacy and fluency in English.
2. Instruction is most effective when goals are clear, context is meaningful, content is rich, and students are engaged. Students need ample opportunities for repetition and use of words, whether from hearing stories read aloud or investigating items of interest to them.
3. Comprehension strategies for native speakers are ineffective for ELs, who comprehend best from simplified text.

– Creating Language-Rich Instruction for English-Language Learners

Reading Teacher, (October, 2008), Vol.62, No.2, Pages 176-178

by Bauer, Eurydice B.; Manyak, Patrick C.

The article explores the educational benefits of developing a language-rich classroom to facilitate EL comprehension. In order for students to build upon their background knowledge, teachers should use visuals, demonstrations, and graphic organizers. Likewise, students should be exposed to hands-on activities and have ample opportunities to hear rich and stimulating stories read aloud. Instructional conversational strategies are developed "when students and teachers engage in meaningful interactions where students' ideas are sought, valued, and incorporated in the curriculum content." ELs benefit from instructional conversations because they 1) activate and build upon important schemata, 2) promote and support more complex language, 3) support statement, proposition, and inquiry development through scaffolding of discourse processes.

Moving Beyond No Child Left Behind with the Merged Model for Reading Instruction *TechTrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, (March, 2009), Vol.59, No.2, Pages 41-47. by Pruisner, Peggy

The creation of a new reading model will effectively enhance the teaching-learning-reading process. Three former reading models are identified: The Reading First Model, A Cognitive Model of Reading (developed by McKenna), and A Stage Model of Reading (developed by Spear-Swerling and

Sternberg). The essential components of a Reading First Model consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Thus it is the first literacy program driven by the high-stakes testing linked to the Title 1 Reading Program. The Cognitive Model contains three strands of skills: automatic recognition, strategic knowledge, and language comprehension. Finally, the Stage Model for reading depicts "the recognitions and insights that develop as non-alphabetic readers, compensatory readers, non-automatic readers, delayed readers, and suboptimal reader continue toward highly proficient reading." The proposed merged model consists of:

- Tutorial Instruction- whole, part, whole approach
- Explicit Instruction- modeling, guided practice, independent practice
- Strategic Instruction- naming, purpose, description, steps, model, practice, reflection
- Before, During and After Reading (BDA)
- Balanced reading instruction

"You can read this text-I'll show you how": Interactive Comprehension

Instruction Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy (February 2008), Vol.1.51, No.5, Pages 372-383 by Lapp, Diane; Fisher, Douglas; Grant, Maria

The authors present information on interactive comprehension instruction, a constructivist approach to learning in which students rely on existing knowledge to develop communication skills. The constructivist approach is designed for students to use a wide variety of thinking, language, and reading strategies to acquire a more extensive understanding of the information they are trying to process. In this approach, the teacher models through think-alouds, modeling predicting, rereading the text, identifying the main idea(s), and segmentation and word study to identify meaning. Think-alouds include four dimensions that focus on vocabulary, comprehension, text structure, and text features.

Upshot:

The real race to the top will begin when teachers are brought back in and allowed to resume implementing the professional knowledge they possess. Through two presidential administrations, Republican and Democrat, this has been taken from our classrooms, reflecting an overriding belief in the top-down, no-choice roll out of prescribed best practices. Good test scores gain traction from good teaching, not from the will of the powerful.

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Shown here: *My Left Hand Path* (14 x 47", mixed media drawing, by Judy Pike

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